

## SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** Audit & Corporate Governance    **DATE:** 5 March 2020

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Sushil Thobhani, Service Lead Governance & Deputy Monitoring Officer

**(For all enquiries)** (01753) 875036

**WARD(S):** All

### PART I FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION

#### LGA PEER REVIEW ON GOVERNANCE - INTERIM REPORT

1 **Purpose of Report**

To provide an interim summary report to the Committee on the informal feedback given by the Local Government Association (“LGA”), via their peer review team, following their peer review of the Council’s governance arrangements on 3-5 February 2020, pending the receipt of the LGA’s final report.

2 **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Panel is requested to consider and note the contents of this Report.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

3a. **Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

Good governance arrangements will have positive implications for the SJWS and the JSNA

3b **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Good governance arrangements will enhance all the outcomes of the Five Year Plan

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications at this stage

(b) Risk Management

Recommendation from section 2	Risks/Threats/ Opportunities	Current Controls	Using the Risk Management Matrix Score the risk	Future Controls
	Political, Legal & Regulatory risks associated	Existing operating constitutional	Probability: 3 Impact: 2	Enhanced and fortified governance

	with decisions taken on existing arrangements	arrangements		arrangements for the future
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(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

Constitutional and Governance arrangements rely for their effectiveness on the exercise of disciplinary powers which has the potential to engage provisions in the Human Rights Act relating to rights to a fair hearing and of freedom of thought and expression.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to prepare, keep up to date and publicise a constitution whose contents are partly prescribed by statute and partly matters of local content within a statutory framework.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no identified need for an EIA at this stage.

5 Supporting Information

5.1 Between 5 and 8 February 2019 the Council underwent a formal corporate Peer Review by a corporate peer review team from the LGA.

5.2 The LGA presented its formal findings of their review by way of a written feedback report to the Council in February 2019.

5.3 In the executive summary of their feedback report the LGA Corporate Peer Review Team said they:

***“...found an organisation that is learning to move away from a time of crisis toward delivering an exciting new future for the Borough. This journey will need a much deeper commitment to the principles of good governance and a clear roadmap of how the Council will deliver this to ensure that the highest ethical standards are at the heart of every decision taken”.***

5.4 In the body of their Report the LGA Corporate Peer Review Team recommended that the Council develop their Governance from “basic control” to good and that the Council invite the LGA to carry out a bespoke review of its governance arrangements.

5.5 The Council accepted the recommendations of the LGA Corporate Review Team and invited a team from the LGA to carry out such a bespoke governance review, which they did between 3 and 5 February 2020.

5.6 The formal feedback report from the LGA is now awaited. The team did, however provide informal feedback to a meeting of Members and Officers on 5 February 2020 on the highlights of their findings.

5.7 The overall salient message from the LGA Governance Review Team is as follows:

- ***the Council is ambitious to improve and senior officers and members understand why governance is a key part of that***
- ***The Council has made significant and tangible progress on governance issues over the last 2 years. People are confident of further improvement under the current leadership.***
- ***Many of the building blocks of an effective governance framework are in place. There are still some gaps in the framework which need to be filled.***
- ***There is more to do to embed a strong foundation of good governance and apply and own it consistently.***

5.8 In respect of particular areas, the LGA Governance Peer Review Team gave their informal findings as follows:

#### **Leadership & Culture**

- **Good governance must be embedded regardless of the delivery of the transformation programme**
- **Not all staff understand the practical importance of good governance which was reflected in poor practice in some areas**

#### **Organisation and standards**

- **Managers feel that the scheme of delegations does not allow them to make effective and timely decisions**
- **A decision making framework and documentation is in place**
- **Clear lines of accountability and terms of reference have been established for committees and boards**
- **The quality of reports is inconsistent to the extent that some are not fit for purpose**
- **There are not always sufficient opportunities for members to engage in briefings and agenda settings**
- **The importance and purpose of Audit and Governance Committee is not fully understood. It is not well supported and many people are saying it is focusing on the wrong things**
- **The external audit is not yet complete. Grant Thornton and SBC are working closely to get outstanding issues resolved.**
- **The current temporary Monitoring Officer arrangement is widely considered to require resolution as a priority**
- **There needs to be a refreshed comprehensive member training and development programme**

#### **Decision Making & Scrutiny**

- **There are some good examples of pre-decision scrutiny and task and finish group work**
- **The Council does not give scrutiny the status it requires and it lacks senior officer champions**

- **Scrutiny is not sufficiently enabled and supported to address the key strategic issues facing the authority**
- **The council could make better use of Democratic Services and “Modgov” in ensuring there is a consistent approach to managing agendas**

5.9 The LGA Governance Peer Review Team’s anticipated recommendations included the following:

- **Good governance must be embedded regardless of the delivery of the transformation programme and the Council should ensure all staff understand why governance is important to their daily work**
- **Ensure Councillors are appropriately engaged and supported through active involvement in agenda planning, training and briefings**
- **Proceed quickly to appoint a suitably qualified and experienced Monitoring Officer**
- **Establish a comprehensive Member training and development programme**
- **Review the scheme of delegations and ensure the new scheme is understood by everyone involved**
- **Ensure scrutiny is given greater status and support to enable it to focus on the key strategic issues facing the authority**
- **Ensure all Councillors are appropriately informed about issues happening in their ward**

## 6 **Comments of Other Committees**

The Member Panel on the Constitution has received an interim report in these terms and the Monitoring Officer will also receive this interim report on the LGA Peer Review on Governance.

## 7 **Conclusion**

The formal findings and evaluation of evidence of the LGA Governance Peer Review Team are now awaited and a final report upon these findings will be brought to the Committee at the first available meeting of the Committee, following the receipt of these findings. It is expected that the Council will formulate an action plan to implement the recommendations of the LGA Governance Peer Review Team and this too will be brought to the Committee at the appropriate time.

## 8 **Background Papers**

LGA Corporate Peer Review Challenge Feedback Report 5-8 February 2019

LGA Governance Peer Review Team informal feedback 5 February 2019.